

“Out of My Comfort Zone”: Understanding the Impact of a Service-Learning Experience in Rural El Salvador

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Abstract

This qualitative case study was designed to explore student's perceptions of the impact of a two-week service-learning experience in rural El Salvador. Students stayed in an economically impoverished village in rural El Salvador and worked on projects that promoted education for children in the village. Participants included 15 graduate and undergraduate students. Multiple data sources were used to understand these impacts including: open-ended interviews conducted two to four months after the trip; field notes from participant observations in large and small group activities, group reflections; and informal incidents and conversations; review of student journals; student final papers, and daily activity and health logs.

While the initial process of adjustment was difficult for some students, all students felt that this experience had an important, positive impact on them. Data indicated that this impact occurred in all three major areas addressed in this study, including: personal (e.g., sense of appreciation, gaining perspective, rethinking consumption, clarifying values, and learning they “could do it”/self-efficacy), professional (affirming career choices, ability to work with Latino children and families; improving professional skills), and global awareness (e.g., perspectives on poverty and social justice, views of immigration, understanding of the world). The data further indicated a more explicit impact on personal, professional and global awareness of participants who identified themselves as future teachers, thus with a potential positive influence on future children under their care, particularly children who are poor and/or immigrants. Findings are discussed in terms of extant literature related to the impact of short-term service experiences.

Keywords

service learning, short-term study abroad, education, El Salvador, pre-service teachers, early childhood

Introduction

The student population of public schools across the United States is increasingly diverse. White students now represent 50% of the population,

with growing numbers of Hispanic students (26 %), a relatively steady number of black students (16%), a greater number of all students living in poverty (NCES, 2015). In contrast, the teaching

force remains mostly white (83%), female (76%) and middle-class (NCES, 2015). As a result, there is a need to help teachers develop empathy for students from diverse backgrounds (Lam, Kolomitro, & Alampambil, 2011). One potential way for pre-service teachers to gain empathy and understanding of other perspectives is by participating in service learning study abroad experiences (Lam, Kolomitro, & Alampambil, 2011). Currently, less than 2.1% of college students from the United States participate in any type of study abroad experience (Donnelly-Smith, 2009). Recent initiatives have increased the number of students going abroad, particularly those choosing short-term programs (six weeks or less); in fact, it is estimated that 56% choose short-term programs (Bately & Lupi, 2012).

Although short-term programs have sometimes been viewed as the *step child* of longer-term study abroad programs due to their origins as summertime *vacation* experiences (Donnelly-Smith, 2009), they have increased in popularity for a number of reasons. For students in majors that require multiple, semester-long practicums, (e.g., education and nursing), academic programs tend to be highly structured with little flexibility and students do not have a free semester (or year) to spend abroad. For these students, short-term programs often represent the only option (Kostovich & Bermele, 2011; Smith and Mitry, 2013). An additional advantage is that short-term programs are far less expensive than semester or year-long programs, making them attractive from a financial perspective. Students often must graduate in the shortest time possible and the expense of a semester abroad with the potential of extending the time at the university past four years is an economic impossibility (Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Smith & Mitry, 2008). Another benefit of short-term programs, unlike longer programs, is that faculty often custom design courses and accompany students which can help

alleviate fears of traveling abroad. Moreover, when faculty accompany students, they can deconstruct the experience with additional lectures, group discussions and assignments to scaffold students' experience (Kostovich, & Bermele, 2011; Bately, & Lupi, 2012).

Despite the increasing popularity of short-term programs, there is limited research focused on their potential impact on students (Batey, & Lupi, 2012; Mapp, 2012). Some studies suggest that when short-term programs are paired with on campus classes and activities before and after the program, they have become launching points for multicultural awareness of the educational, social, and political relationships between other cultures and those of the students (Crabtree, 2013; Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Kirkland, 2014; Phillion, Malewski, Sharma & Wang, 2009). Interestingly, Phillion et al. (2009) also found that when there is careful planning of the structure, there was no significant difference in global engagement between students in short-term programs and those in longer-term programs. Notably, Jia, Peyvandi, Moghaddam (2011) argue that when short-term programs include *experiential characteristics* (i.e., authentic opportunities to spend time with local people, participating in local activities) rather than a non-immersive approach (i.e., stays in hotels, guided tours, etc.) the impact of short-term programs was enhanced. Castaneda & Zirger's (2011) findings concur. In their ethnographic study of an experiential three-week program in a small town in Honduras, where students lived with local families and worked on service projects, the result was increased cultural understanding. They argue

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that short-term programs need to construct programs with sustained contact with the host families and the community to maximize the potential for meaningful learning experiences.

The studies that do exist regarding the impact of short-term programs have focused on students in majors outside of education (e.g., Spanish, nursing, social work) or unidentified majors (Castaneda & Zirger, 2011; Kiely, 2004, 2005; Mapp, 2012; Reynolds-Case, 2013; Smith & Mitry, 2013). For example, Czerwionka, Artamonova & Barbosa (2015) conducted a qualitative study of a Spanish course in Madrid. Interviews conducted before and after the program revealed that the students' experienced a change and growth in intercultural knowledge during their short period abroad.

Impact on Pre-Service Teachers

The literature is limited when investigating the impact of short-term study abroad programs on students majoring in education, and those that exist have primarily focused on the impact of the study abroad experience on the students' global awareness. For example, Phillion, et al. (2009) studied pre-service teachers who participated in a three-week program in Honduras. They found that studying abroad provided participants with an important starting point for understanding "the educational, social, and political relationships between their lives and other cultures." (p. 335). They also found that experiences such as these had an impact on pre-service teachers understanding of themselves and how to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. In a follow up study Malewski, Sharma and Phillion (2012) examined how international field experiences promote cross-cultural awareness in U.S. pre-service teachers through experiential learning. This study examined the experience of 49 pre-service teachers during short-term programs in Honduras over the course of six years. Students volunteered in local schools, took two required

courses and visited local historical sites. The authors concluded that experiential learning in an international context played a key role in developing cross-cultural awareness among pre-service teachers. They recommended that teacher preparation programs include international field placements with an experiential component as a means to promote cross-cultural awareness and understanding of students from diverse backgrounds. Palmer and Menard-Warwick (2012) reported similar findings in their ethnographic study of pre-service teachers taking a one-month course in Mexico. They found that the students developed multicultural awareness and skills while teaching children English. The course yielded pre-service teachers who developed a "critical understanding of the systematic nature of inequality in immigrant children's lives" (p. 17), as well as the skills and empathy necessary to effectively teach children learning a second language. Similarly, Czerwionka, Artamonova & Barbosa (2015) studied language and cultural learning and revealed that students experienced a change in intercultural knowledge during their short period abroad indicating cultural adaptation via daily life, food and drink, values and politics.

Summary

Most of the studies we found regarding the impact of study abroad courses on students studying education have focused on the potential of such courses to promote global awareness. These studies have found that intentionally crafted, immersive, service learning experiences have the most impact on the perspective and world view of pre-service teachers. There are also a limited number of studies which conclude that such courses can build cultural competency and empathy to help students become effective teachers. Interestingly, none of the studies explored the impact of these experiences on students' professional development nor did they

do in-depth exploration of the personal impact on pre-service teachers. Given the limited time that pre-service teachers have to participate in study abroad experiences, it would also be useful to better understand the potential of this option to help students develop their professional skills, as well as its impact on personal and global perspectives.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine how a short-term, service based, study abroad experience requiring full immersion in rural El Salvador would impact participating students. El Salvador was selected because the metropolitan area in close proximity to the university has a large and growing population of Salvadoran immigrants, and pre-service teachers frequently have Salvadoran students in their internships. The present analysis was part of a larger study focused on the nature of the impact on students, and what factors contributed to creating that impact. For the purposes of this analysis, we specifically addressed the following questions: 1) What were students' perceptions of the impact of this experience on a personal level? 2) What were students' perceptions of the professional impact? 3) What were student perceptions of the program's impact on their global awareness?

Methods

This paper reports findings from a larger case study using ethnographic methods to focus specifically on the impact of a two-week study abroad course on participating students. The course was structured as a service-learning experience in which participants lived and worked in a remote mountain village in El Salvador on projects related to education. In the two months prior to the trip, students met with course instructors on three occasions and completed a series of assigned readings about the history of El Salvador, education in El Salvador,

and day-to-day life in the village. They were also assigned to one of three work groups, and were required to develop preliminary lessons and activities that they hoped to implement in the village. Once in-country, they attended a series of lectures and orientation meetings on issues related to history, education and immigration. Group reflections took place two to three times per week throughout the trip. They were structured to address particular issues that instructors and leaders had found important with previous groups and to address issues that emerged during the course of students' stay in the village.

Participants

Participants for this analysis included 15 students; all were female. Nine were students in a five-year program culminating in both a bachelor's and master's degree and certification in Early Childhood Special Education. Two were master's students specializing in Minority and Urban Education, other undergraduate majors ($n=1$ per major) included Elementary Education, Early Childhood, Biology/Pre-med, and Psychology/Pre-med. The students in Early Childhood Special Education had their tuition covered by a grant focused on working with students from diverse cultures and required an immersion experience (this course was only one possible option). Two students were fluent in Spanish, a few spoke some Spanish, but more than half had no Spanish skills. Students ranged between 20-29 years of age; 11 were between 20-24 years of age; the remaining four were between 25-29. Eight participants were Caucasian, two were African-American, three were Asian (East Indian, Korean), one was multiracial and one was Latino (Brazilian). All of the students except two were born in the northeastern part of the United States; one was born in Brazil and one was born in Korea. Thirteen of the students came from middle to upper middle class families based on the occupations of their parents. All but three had

traveled outside the U.S. prior to the trip, most frequently Europe. Eight had visited a developing country previously; three of those had been to Mexico, Honduras, the Dominican Republic or El Salvador, though none had lived with host families. The decision to participate in this study was voluntary and did not impact student's final grade.

Procedures

We used ethnographic methods as part of a qualitative case study to investigate students' perception of the trip's impact on them personally, professionally and on their global awareness. The primary data source for this study was open-ended, individual interviews conducted with students two to four months after they returned (and after they had received their grades for the course). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim within two weeks of the interview; one student agreed to be interviewed, but declined to have her interview audio-recorded.

Additional data sources included field notes maintained by the course instructors during the two weeks that students were in-country; journals maintained by students during the trip and submitted as part of course requirements; and final student reflection papers submitted one week after returning to the U.S. We maintained daily activity logs as well as daily health logs based on individual meetings with students every morning regarding their health and overall well-being. In addition, the instructors maintained analytic memos on the process of carrying out the educational projects and the group reflections. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire prior to the trip.

As recommended by Creswell (2013) and other authors, we used multiple methods to assure credibility and trustworthiness. Specifically, we triangulated across data sources by collecting information from multiple students. We also triangulated across methods

by using multiple methods (e.g., interviews, observations, document review) to obtain data. We also used prolonged engagement, beginning our involvement with students two months prior to the trip and continuing to engage them through post-trip interviews and informal contacts up to four months following the trip. Both the informal contacts and post-trip interviews provided an opportunity for member checking.

Data Analysis

After data was collected it was reduced and transformed using multiple methods that are common in qualitative research including coding and writing analytic memos (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Data was analyzed using an inductive, constant comparison process so that key concepts could emerge. Investigators independently read and reread transcripts, papers, journals, field notes as well as daily health logs maintained on each student. We used an in-vivo coding process in which chunks of meaningful data (e.g., phrase, sentence or multiple sentences that conveyed an idea or concept or described an incident) were identified and independently coded by using participants' words wherever possible to form initial codes. As recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998), we assigned every possible coding category to each unit of data. During this process we met regularly to review codes, compile them into a central list, and refine them to eliminate redundancies. We met regularly to continue discussing and refining initial codes and group them into conceptually related categories. We continued the process of categorizing and collapsing codes until themes emerged for all research questions.

Context

As part of this course, students stayed in the village of La Secoya¹, a small village of approximately 400 inhabitants that sits high on

a mountain about one and a half hours from El Salvador's capital. Unless they can get a ride in the back of a local truck, residents who want to go into a nearby town must walk for 45-60 minutes down a mountain and then take the bus. Although the village is small, it has five distinct neighborhoods spread up and down the mountain. The center of the village has a church, a *cancha* (sports field), and a *tienda* (small store that sells drinks, snacks, etc.). From there it takes another 20-30 minutes to walk uphill to the neighborhoods that are highest on the mountain. The road is mostly dirt or cobblestone and the walk is steep. Daily life requires villagers to go up and down the mountain frequently. The village is situated in the middle of beautiful trees and flowers and views from the highest points are spectacular. This mountain was at the center of the twelve-year civil war that ended in 1992; during the war, many residents were killed, fled, or joined the guerilla fighters who occupied the mountain. After the peace accords, some families returned to dig out and rebuild the village, which had been besieged by fighting. Although the war ended 23 years prior to this study, many older villagers fought in the war and still tell heartbreakingly stories of loss and survival.

With the resettlement of the village, it has become an active place, which has received support and attention from local NGOs. Families primarily survive by doing subsistence farming; others have family members who work in the capital or nearby cities; still others receive some help from family members living in the United States. Life in the village is busy and the work is hard with people often walking long distances to work in their *milpas* (fields). While a few are fortunate enough to own the land they work, most rent land. The *milpas* are perched on the side of the mountain and working the land is strenuous labor, which is almost always done by hand. By 5:00 AM the village is already awake and bustling, dogs barking and roosters

crowding. Most people bathe with cold water from the local river, a community fountain, or with rain water collected in barrels and then use a *guacale* (a shallow plastic bucket) to pour the water over their heads. More fortunate families have constructed some form of a shower. A few have toilets that flush, though most use latrines. Breakfast consists of coffee, beans and tortillas. Women or older children carry water from the river or nearby community fountain. Clothes are typically washed at the river or at a community "pila" which require women to walk, usually downhill, to do laundry; wet laundry is then carried back up hill.

The local elementary school is perched high on the mountain; it has two teachers who cover preschool to sixth grade. Teacher absenteeism is common; a previous study documented that one teacher was absent 19 out of 60 days (Beckman and Syrgley, 2014, 2015; Syrgley, 2013). There was a notable lack of infrastructure and resources in the school; few books and virtually no didactic resources. At the time of the study there were holes in the roof and broken windows, so that during the rainy season the school often flooded. At the time of this study, the NGO, which hosted the delegation of students, was also in the process of building a community *biblioteca* (library). The *biblioteca* was intended to mitigate the limitations of the public schools as well as provide access to books, computers and a variety of classes and enrichment activities to support learning for everyone from children through adults. At the time of the study, the building had not yet been completed; there was no bathroom or access to water.

During the two-week trip, students lived in pairs with village families; as a result, housing conditions for students varied. If the family did not have access to running water, the student did not have access to running water; if families used latrines, students used latrines. Families with the fewest resources had homes that were

one or two room shelters built of adobe, had dirt floors, used outdoor latrines, walked for water and bathed from buckets. Students who stayed with somewhat more fortunate families were in houses made of cinderblock with concrete or tile floors, and in rare cases, had indoor bathroom facilities, sometimes with flush toilets and showers; other times with indoor toilets that required users to pour water which had been carried from the nearest water source into a tank. All but the poorest families had a “pila” or large concrete sink.

The NGO provided clean drinking water for students during their stay to prevent them from contracting water-borne illnesses. Except for two designated meals with their host families, students also ate together at a central location. Cooks were local village women who cooked local food and were trained to cook in ways to reduce the chances that students would become ill (e.g., use only the bottled water in the cooking; wash fruits and vegetables with bleached or bottled water, etc.). Students walked up and down the mountain – either to get to their work site or to get to the group meals, community activities, group reflections, etc.

Each day, students rose in time to walk to a central eating location for breakfast by 7:00 AM. Breakfast always included hot tea and tortillas and, as is common in El Salvador, frijoles. In addition, fruit, cereal, bread and peanut butter were made available by the NGO as these foods were more familiar to the U.S. students. The cooks sometimes prepared eggs or pancakes. By 8:00 AM, students were working alongside villagers on one of three educational projects. Four students and one leader made home visits to families who had infants and young children who they perceived to be too young to attend the biblioteca. These students worked directly with families to demonstrate ways of stimulating the development of the very youngest children. Two of the graduate students

who had some experience in teacher training worked alongside one instructor and one local leader hired by the NGO to develop and conduct teacher training activities for facilitators (local villagers who were paid by the NGO to work in the biblioteca each day) of La Secoya as well as three other bibliotecas sponsored by the NGO. The focus was on giving the facilitators strategies that they could use when teaching the children. The remaining, largest number of students worked directly with children in the biblioteca (library), developing and leading lessons and enrichment activities for the estimated 35 children who attended. The focus was on implementing fun, hands-on educational activities designed to help children overcome the barriers they faced in school – with a particular focus on reading and math.

In the evenings and on weekends, students attended presentations on special topics (e.g., immigration, popular education, the history of the civil war) from individuals living in the area which were arranged by the community leaders or NGO. During their stay they also participated in local activities (e.g., fiestas, hikes, dances, soccer games) and other recreational activities organized for the group by the community (e.g., food exchanges, talent shows). To promote students’ understanding of the culture as well as facilitate connection between villagers and students, pairs of students assisted the cooks at each meal preparing food, clearing the table or washing dishes at the pila. Students had very little free time from the time they woke up at 6:00 AM until they went to bed, and the little they had was spent writing in their journals (a requirement of the course) or catching a quick nap. Group reflections were held informally at each meal and formally 2-3 times per week, and focused on what students had learned, seen and done, and their reactions to particular situations or speakers (e.g., listening to the residents of the village describe conditions during the civil war, a thwarted immigration attempt to the U.S., or to

debrief and update the rest of the group on the various activities being carried out in the village).

Findings

Students all indicated² that living and working in El Salvador was an important part of their educational development. Teri expressed the general view of students by saying, "...it was an amazing experience...it was really, really a life changing experience for me... probably some of the two best weeks in the last ten years of my life." And Lisa wrote in her final paper "El Salvador changed my life more than I could ever imagined..."

At the same time most students also described it as "the hardest thing I've ever done." Many found the initial days to be challenging, and in follow-up interviews, several described themselves as "out of my comfort zone" – a term that also emerged in journals and was documented in field notes. In part, this feeling came from not knowing what to expect. Although a few had been to developing countries previously, they had never lived with economically impoverished families, and found that adjusting to the realities of the challenging living conditions was difficult. Many described a sense of vulnerability that came from difficult living conditions, not speaking the language, and being out of contact with family and friends (Beckman & Christenson, 2015). Despite those initial struggles, by the time they returned to the U.S., all students were universally positive about the impact the trip had on them. Ellie struggled throughout the trip with various issues (i.e., not sleeping, feeling ill, etc.). In her final paper she explained, "There was much anxiety leading up to this trip personally. I was nervous about every aspect of it.... the next two weeks were an emotional rollercoaster...a driving force for personal growth." By the end of the trip she declared "This experience was the most worthwhile of my life."

Impact

"I came home a different way"

All participants in this program indicated that El Salvador had an important impact on them, a reaction that Ellie explained in the words of a Catholic nun who had been in El Salvador since the civil war and who was one of the guest speakers for the group, "Sister Maggie says, 'You come home a different way.' And I think I definitely came home a different person than I was when I went." She added, "I feel like, unless you're there, you don't really realize how strongly it impacts you." Key themes related to the impact of the trip emerged in all three dimensions that were the focus of this study: personal, professional, and global awareness.

Personal Impact

While the personal impact of this experience varied somewhat from student to student, all identified one or more ways in which they were influenced. Themes that emerged in this area included: sense of appreciation, gaining perspective, rethinking consumption, clarifying values, and learning they "could do it"/self-efficacy.

Sense of Appreciation

By far the most common and consistently mentioned theme was a new sense of appreciation that extended into many different parts of students' lives. This sense was expressed repeatedly and by all students during post-trip follow-up interviews, reflections, journal entries and final papers. This included appreciation of people in their lives; opportunities they had for education; and for day-to-day aspects of their lives which they had taken for granted. Most of these reactions were specifically tied to the nature of this experience, sometimes because of the relationships they observed in the village, sometimes because they had to live without the daily comforts they were used to at home, and

sometimes because of the needs they observed in the village. Sally summed up the sentiment saying, "... I'm blessed, I'm so lucky for every little thing." During a group reflection Kirra noted how staying in a multigenerational household influenced her, "Before going on this trip I had taken for granted the people I can learn from. My parents and grandparents and I need to go home and learn from them while I can."

Ellie was among several students who found herself being "thankful" for the opportunities she had, "...like being able to go to college, and not having to take five buses and get up really early, and be on the road for two hours just to get to college." She noted, ".... that's how I've been viewing everything. This is a gift...." Despite her own day-to-day frustrations at school she noted, "...at least I have the opportunity to further on my education...people in El Salvador would kill ...just to be able to go to school and learn something. And I get that every day, so I should make the most of it..." Niki also described how a newfound sense of gratitude influenced her approach to her studies, noting, "... instead of complaining, I'm thankful that I can take this course this year, because they don't have opportunity to even go to a university."

Students were also grateful for day-to-day things that they had previously taken for granted. Ellie noted, "I came home just appreciative of everything. Like, being able to use a toilet and flush it without having to dump a bucket of water into the toilet. Or washing my hands with running water." Janet concurred, "... coming back and for the first showers that I took that week, just like appreciating what like just running water...realizing what we do have." Sally also commented, "Having a hot shower is a luxury and people really take it for granted."

Gaining Perspective

The new sense of appreciation gave students a new perspective on things that used to be of

concern. While the specifics were different from student to student, several reported that their tendency to worry or become upset had changed, in part because they came to know villagers who confronted far more serious challenges on a daily basis. Lisa explained, "...the trip definitely helped me to slow down and kind of appreciate the things around me at that moment rather than spend all of my time worrying." Ellie also learned to take things more in stride, saying "...those trivial little things that I worried about before going to El Salvador didn't even matter anymore...I think they're really unimportant now...." This change became particularly clear to her when she injured her finger near the end of the trip. Recalling how she would have reacted previously, she said, "I used to be one of those people that as soon as I had a headache for three days or something, I was convinced I had a brain tumor...I just go to the extreme, the worst case." She added, "I think the old Ellie would have been like, 'Oh my gosh. I just broke my finger.' I would have just brought this level of drama..." On returning, she decided that "...I'm not gonna freak out about something like that... it has no place."

Although specific to individual students, some reported changes in perspective that they found especially profound. Ellie described the way this trip helped her with her "trust issues." The trip helped because, "I didn't know any of these people [villagers, leaders] going into it. But I had to trust them because they were the ones that knew what was going on; they spoke the language." She recalled, "There was no time for them to do things to show me that I could trust them.... It was just throwing myself in and hoping for the best... you had no choice but to trust them." For her doing this had a profound impact. She explained,

I came home just being able to trust. That was a really big take away for me... just being able to like, say, 'Well, it's okay. I can trust this person.' They don't have to

earn my trust, they don't have to do things to earn it. I can just trust them because they're a person, and there's no reason for me not to trust them... I just had this new just idea of what trust is. And it was completely different than when I left."

Daniela described a change in perspective about the way she saw her day-to-day life, saying,

I can't even necessarily explain how the change happened, so profoundly, but I was able to just see things in a new light. Like, I love working with these kids. I love going to work even though I have to drive an hour, you know? I learned to enjoy that hour...I have the time to maybe think or listen to music, you know? I just try to find the positive in everything.

For these students, living in circumstances that were so different than they were used to (e.g., multi-generational household, homes which lacked basic amenities, lack of access to technology) combined with numerous opportunities to reflect (e.g., group reflections, informal conversations with leaders and other students, journals) created a space in which fundamental questions could be considered. Daniela found it to be "... almost kind of a spiritual influence..." adding

...it was this really free space for everybody just to talk about their backgrounds, and it kind of made me, morph, and re-define, kind of my beliefs... just give me more ideas; more things to think about; more things to want to explore. And it all just kind of ties in about, 'Why are we here?' Like, how do we, like, live, and actually live, and take advantage of the time we have? About the people we have? And what we have? The opportunities we have?

Rethinking Consumption

Ellie explained how her view of material possessions had changed saying, "... I came home and got rid of half of my possessions." Recognizing how much need she had observed in El Salvador, she reconsidered her own needs,

... I realized how little you actually need to be happy, and to survive. We don't need all of the designer clothes, or a million pairs of shoes, or even, honestly, we don't even need our toilets really. It's just all of this stuff that we have...not out of actual need for it.

Niki also found that the trip made her think about consumption, noting, "... If I buy stuff, I always think to myself, 'Is it really necessary, or is it just something that I want because everyone else has it?' Lydie also thought more about the implications of her spending noting that it "...became a very big thing for me...why would I just bother spending money as if it's nothing? It just made me be more thoughtful, I think, about everything in general." Darcey had a similar reaction, "... we take so much for granted and we're so wasteful ...it bothers me more than it did even before...to see how wasteful people are here..." The only student who did not outwardly appear to have this realization about consumption was Sasha, a student raised by a single mother who shared during a group reflection "It is very similar to places I have been to in Virginia that have no plumbing."

Clarifying Values

Many students described the way in which the experience influenced their values, sometimes challenging them and sometimes affirming them. Darcey explained,

I find myself wanting to give more in all ways, whether it's in my teaching or...in everything...wanting to give more, and to encourage, like to open others to what else is out there.

Laila described the experience as reaffirming values that she already had, "...just being grateful ...and not judging people". Lydie also mentioned the importance of not judging people in the context of group dynamics, saying, "I would have never really just judged someone right off the bat... I guess it just made it even more so...why people are the way that they are, and then kind of accepting it and trying to find a middle ground..." She also felt that it changed the way she reacted to other people, saying, "I guess like, more of the petty issues...I've just kind of chosen to...stray away from those kinds of people that cause more issues than fix them..." Finally, in a moment of self-discovery, Lisa reflected,

I'm very quick to speak and have my opinion heard, but I think on this trip I learned a lot about taking a step back and listening to other people, so being able...to listen to the people in the community and our other classmates just sharing what they knew and the things they had learned... it was nice to just be a listener for once.

Niki reflected about how the experience changed her values, describing her realization that, "...they don't have enough resources... but from what I observed, they're happier.... the first thing I told my parents when I came back. I was like, "Money isn't everything." They were happy, and they were so sweet..." At the same time Niki struggled with the way "they treat their animals." The experience taught her that values are not always so easy to change and to contemplate why. She noted, "Before that, I was like, 'Oh, anyone can change if they think that's not the right thing...'"

"I could do it."/Self-efficacy

Several students commented about how important it was that they were able to get past the initial challenges and do something that they

found to be difficult. As one of the students who had the most difficulty at the outset, Sally expressed a sense of great accomplishment by the end of the trip, "... you don't think you can and then when you do it's like wow, like I did it." Lisa had a similar realization, which she described as changing her view of herself, "It was such a great experience for me to really push myself and to see I could do it, I'm not as much of a high maintenance person as I considered myself to be." She added, "I think the biggest thing was I learned that I can challenge myself. I can put myself in situations where I don't know anybody and I don't speak the native language and I can thrive and I can succeed..." Noemi also felt she changed during the trip as she stated in her final paper, "During this trip I learned how to adapt and become open to situations I am not comfortable with." Although Tammy had difficulty adjusting initially, she ended the trip feeling accomplished, stating in her final journal reflection, "I feel like my life changed. I feel like I am a new person from this experience. A happier and more confident person." Niki also explained how the trip became something more to her than she originally intended, saying, First, I was like, 'It's just going to look good on my resume,' but I feel like it's more than that. Yeah, it really makes you look back to what you have done."

Approach to Technology

Students on this trip did not have the kind of access to technology that they were used to; they did not have access to Wi-Fi and the NGO did not permit cell phones and computers. Darcey felt the lack of technology helped facilitate her friendships with others, saying,

... it was so freeing to pay attention to the person that was in front of you.... people talked; people paid attention. They're not on their phones and looking up.... it's a huge help...

Lydie concurred, "... first of all, I loved it." Upon returning she found herself frustrated by the expectation that she always had to be connected when at home, noting, "... I've actually recently decided that I was going to pick one day of the week to turn off my phone entirely.... just completely turn it off...to get away from it.... it's not a great feeling to always be connected." Janet noted during a group reflection "The interaction [with my host family] without TV is beautiful." Kayla also thought that the lack of technology was important, saying,

...I didn't have computer for two weeks... it was hard but I think it was a good life lesson. ...it changed me just when I'm out with people. I try not to be so engulfed in my phone and work. I try to actually focus on them and our conversation...

Professional Impact

All of the students also described ways in which the program had influenced them professionally. Three major themes emerged in this area, including, clarification of career path, approach to Latino children and families, and improving as a professional.

Career Path

In all but one case, students reported that working in El Salvador had caused them to think about their career path in some cases by affirming it, in others by giving them more focus within their chosen career, and in one case, changing it. Sally summed this up in her final paper, "after working with the children in the village for the past two weeks, I am extremely certain that a career in the field of special education is right for me." In Lisa's case, the trip "rejuvenated and solidified" her career choice, "I knew that I wanted to work in a diverse classroom....so this kind of trip helped to further develop my knowledge and experience..."

Several students found that while it confirmed their career choice, it also helped focus specific interests. As a biology/premed major, Niki noted, "I really learned what I'm passionate about I was thinking about going into pediatrics, but I wasn't sure.... now, after the trip, I think I really want to work with children. Darcey also found a focus that was important to her,

I still want to teach, like I always did, young kids...and kids from less fortunate environments...now I want to work even more with that. Especially with the Hispanic population...to work with not only the kids, but the families; to see how, if we can get them involved, how beneficial it is to the kids, and to the families.

Similarly, Daniela remained quite interested in teaching preschool but found that doing home visits in El Salvador sparked an interest in working with families. She explained,

... I just fell in love with home visits, specifically, and working with the families in their homes...seeing where they live, and where their kids experience most of their actual education and growth, you know? And talking about their beliefs about their children; it was just, it was wonderful, and it made me just think infant/toddler. Home visits...family-centered teaching... I'm just kind of falling in love with that philosophy...

Janet liked assuming a leadership role in the biblioteca, saying in her final journal reflection, "...I really learned about my passion to go beyond the classroom, to not just be in the classroom ..." She began to feel that "...it could easily be translated back here and after a few years in the classroom." While it solidified Daniela's career choice and opened up a new focus in her field, she also found it freeing, realizing that she had options and that

continuing was a choice, “I was just so happy there, and it made me realize how I don’t have to do anything I do; I can change my whole life course, and do a whole new set of things.”

Teri also found that the trip pushed her in a very different direction. Although she arrived in El Salvador as an early childhood special education major, by the end of the trip the poverty and lack of access to health care in the village renewed her interest in going to medical school. She said,

...it's kind of given me a little bit more confidence to actually think about what I want to do with my life...it really kind of was one of the big pushes to make me want to change my career and go back to kind of my more biology side. And pursue medical school.

This interest was heightened shortly after the trip when she learned that one of the group’s cooks, Lena, a 35-year-old mother of two of the children attending the biblioteca had died of an illness that should have been preventable, “... it upsets me so much, you know, and she obviously is not the only one that that happens to.” She added that the trip gave her motivation and confidence, to pursue this goal, “... even if I fail ... at least I can say that I tried... a lot of people—they never get any kind of chance like that... so I might as well not let it go, or I’m gonna regret it later.

Approach to Latino Children and Families

Students overwhelmingly reported that the trip made them more comfortable working with Latino children and families and more sensitive to the issues they faced. In her final paper, Sally said, “Now that I have returned to the United States I hope that I can raise awareness regarding issues that Salvadoran families face.”

Being in El Salvador without speaking Spanish had helped Ellie become more

understanding the non-English speaking children students in her class. After the trip, she viewed them as “brave” for continuing to come to school “...one of the biggest takeaways for me, educationally, was just being there and not speaking the language.” She began imagining what it must be like for non-English speaking children when teachers spoke to them in English,

...they don’t understand anything... They probably know five words in English, and it’s really overwhelming, and it really takes a sense of courage and bravery to keep coming back to school.... I don’t think teachers really get that.... It’s really intimidating and scary. But they’re doing it! And their parents are doing it!

As a Special Education major, she described the insight she had after the trip when she felt that a little boy in her placement had been wrongly referred to special education,

They were going through the IEP process, the initial process. And he was non-verbal. And they were saying that he’s just so behind and his parents came in, and, they spoke Spanish, so they had a translator...the little boy is talking to his mom and dad.... rattling things off and saying things to them. ... this kid can speak, he’s not non-verbal; he just doesn’t know the language..... He clearly is not non-verbal. He’s talking to his parents. He had literally just moved here. And he spoke no English.

Several students described ways in which their participation helped them better understand how to work with Latino children in their classes and their families. For example, Lisa observed, “I got a great deal of knowledge about the potential students I will be working with...” She noted that the children she worked with in the biblioteca “loved to do the work at

the school”, but didn’t necessarily have supplies to do homework and had many other responsibilities at home. She observed that as a teacher that “...made it a little more difficult to place an emphasis on doing something that you don’t have the materials to do.” With all of their responsibilities at home she noted, “I could see it being not a priority because there are bigger things like taking care of your family...” Although Kayla had little previous experience working with the Latino population and spoke very little Spanish, she felt that the trip “...gave me a chance to kind of brainstorm different ways that you can still show that you generally care without knowing someone’s language.”

After the trip, Sasha decided to take Spanish and found that it helped her work with Spanish speaking students in her internship: “...They just light up!” Sally felt that it was good to better understand what immigrant families had gone through so that, “...you’re not going to judge your students...you’ll just be more accepting... you’ll be able to teach them better...” Darcey noted “...how they [parents] want to get involved, and a lot of times, it’s a language barrier, it’s a work barrier...” Daniela, who also began studying Spanish when she returned to the U.S., also felt that it influenced her teaching and saw the trip as “.... putting together the whole picture...to actually go to the country that so many people leave to escape...”

For Kayla, participating on the trip “...made me wanna like give back so I really started volunteering as an ESL teacher.” She had been frustrated by the negative attitudes that she had observed toward Spanish speaking students, noting “...how hard they tried to get here [the U.S.], and then we just don’t treat them well just because they don’t speak our language or they live differently.” She realized, “...they wanna learn English so much. They think by learning English, that’s what’s gonna make them successful so if I can give them, give them that help, that’s what I’m gonna try to do.”

Daniela described how the experience changed her comfort level in working with Latino families in U.S. programs and raised her spirits after a bad day:

...the next day I had a home visit with a family who, they’re from Mexico, and, but it’s this house where there’s about two different families that live in the house, and we’re there to see this little two year old, and being in that house was like, it immediately relaxed me...just hearing the music, and hearing the language, and seeing how everyone interacted, and how friendly everyone was... a lot of people kind of sticking their heads in...to support the child and showing sincere interest, and like, all working together to you know, support that child, and it was like, it just boosted my spirits.

This increased comfort level in working with Latino students and families was especially important to students because of the shifting demographics of the state in which it is located. For example, 12.6% of the population speaks a language other than English at home, 12.3% of the population is foreign born, and more than half of the state’s growth between 2000 and 2010 is due to growth of the Hispanic population (Migrant Policy Institute, 2015). State officials report that between 2000 and 2014 there was an unprecedented 208.9% increase in students identified as Hispanic in public schools and many of these students are learning English as a second language (Maryland Department of Planning, 2015). Furthermore 2.1% of the total state population is from El Salvador (Migrant Policy Institute, 2015). Thus, having an understanding of Latino families is essential to professions working with the public.

Improving as a Professional

In addition to describing how going to El Salvador had changed their comfort level in

working with the Latino community, some also described the way it influenced the kind of professional they aspired to be and/or improved their skills. Reflecting back on what she had learned from Sister Maggie, Ellie said,

I try and just make sure there's a part of me in every assignment. Even writing this IEP that is due today... I just wanted to make sure it was a really good reflection of him, because I wanna be the best teacher, the best IEP writer that I can be.

Both Kirra and Darcey commented on how learning about 'popular education³' during the trip influenced their teaching. Kirra felt that what they had learned "... is so applicable to any community. It wasn't just La Secoya, ... even here, even adults." Darcey concurred, "I think being there, hearing Erica talk, how she[used] popular education in her talk; how it was so interactive... has helped me to wantto make things more hands on as much as possible..." She was impressed with the use of popular education in the context of El Salvador, noting, "...we have so much here. So many materials." She added, "...if you can make it into something fun and hands on, or a game, I want to try to do that as much as possible. Especially with preschool and kindergarten, which is what I wanna do, you know?" During the post trip interview Sasha described how working in El Salvador helped to build her teaching skills, such as "how to change lessons, how to adapt lessons. Some of the lessons were too easy for the kids, so we had to change them on the spot... we just had to do a lot of adapting... it was teaching experience." Similarly, Kayla described herself "as a very planned person." and felt it was good to be in a situation that required her to be more flexible. She felt that the trip had helped her "...team building skills and ability to be more flexible..." Teri also felt that it taught her about teamwork, "... I really learned how to kind of rely

on other people; to kind of, work as a team to get, like, our common goal done." Lisa said,

I learned a lot about my patience as a teacher. I was really doubting myself in the beginning when the kids like weren't reciprocating well but I think through the patience and not quitting my lesson, like just keeping going and they eventually warmed up to me and loved it.

Global Awareness

All of the students identified ways in which living and working in El Salvador had influenced their view of the larger world. Themes that emerged included students' views of immigration, views of poverty and social justice, and general knowledge of the world. These themes all have application in the future classrooms of preservice teachers.

"Their hearts are at home"/View of Immigration

A theme which emerged among all students, consistently and repeatedly, in follow-up interviews, students' papers, their journals and during group reflections was the way in which the experience influenced students' views of immigration – sometimes solidifying previously held views, sometimes raising awareness, and sometimes changing preconceived ideas. This occurred in part because they came to know individuals for whom family separation was painful and difficult. For all of the students however, it was the story of Danilo, the smart, kind and charismatic employee of the cooperating NGO that gave them pause. Danilo told of his struggle to support his mother, his sister and his sister's children after his father had deserted the family when he was only twelve. Out of desperation, Danilo finally made the long, dangerous journey to enter the U.S. without documents, only to be caught and deported. The story of this harrowing journey, followed by the pain and humiliation of

his deportation, impacted everyone. When Danilo finished his talk the group sat in silence as his words sunk in and tears ran down most faces in the group. Finally, one student started clapping and the rest joined in.

The students had much to say about Danilo's story. Ellie said in her final paper, "Before this trip I knew very little about immigration, and even less about illegal immigration. Now, I know how much people risk when they immigrate." For her, Danilo's story sparked an interest in immigration. She described ways that she was seeking to learn about immigration since returning to the U.S., saying, "I've been trying to find jobs for the summer where I would be working with immigrant families. I'm taking a history of immigration class right now.... I've found this new passion with immigration." She said,

Danilo was also huge, his story had a really big impact on me... it was his story that got me really interested in immigration, and immigration policy... he just had such a heart wrenching story... all the stuff he went through to be put on a plane and sent back... ...now I actually have an interest in the immigration side of that.

Niki, an immigrant herself had a unique perspective to share after Danilo's story. In her final paper she stated,

This experience changed my view of immigration after Danilo's talk. I did not know why there were so many illegal immigrants. I had no respect for illegal immigrants because, as an immigrant myself, I knew how difficult it was to get a green card. I thought it was unfair that illegal immigrants enter the country and enjoy the life in the U.S. while others wait for years to get immigration rights.

However, after Danilo's story about his immigration, I could understand how financially it is impossible to go through

the immigration process. Ever after, I had respect for all illegal immigrants because they want to begin a new chapter of life away from the poverty but have no options because they do not have enough money.

Similarly, for Laila, the issue was salient personally, "...because I'm an immigrant". She was from Brazil and had come into the United States with documents, she emphasized the importance of "...not judging people", commenting,

They are just immigrants trying to survive. ... I am in the process of becoming a citizen.... I don't want to forget that's how I came and how everything happened. some people don't have the choice. I just got lucky. I had the opportunity to stay here legally...

Lisa had similar feelings, "... his story was...so eye opening and so helpful in really understanding the kind of hardships that...people endure to try and make a better life for themselves. It's just incredible." She noted in her final paper "This ... has made me much more sensitive to the various needs of immigrant students." Daniela also described his story as "profound", saying, "...what he had to go through to get here...he actually went through that... it's just overwhelming." Darcey viewed Danilo's story as important "...because we got to know him..." Knowing him put a face on the immigration crisis. She was particularly impressed with his age, noting, "... he was our age...alone, and the conditions. Again, you hear about it, but you don't always meet someone...it really stuck with me, and all he wanted was to give to his family..."

Knowing people from the village who had family members in the U.S. led Daniela to think of "...how separated families can get, and just, how difficult that must be to then be here..." and consider how it might influence the children in her class and their families. She became acutely

aware of how painful the separation could be. She reflected on its impact on the family member in the United States, saying, "...their hearts are in their country; their hearts are at home..."

Several students described ways in which better understanding of this issue made them think about immigrants they encountered in the United States, including those in their school placements. Kayla stated in her final paper, "I now understand the struggles that Salvadoran immigrants go through just to come to the U.S. to have the opportunity to make money to take care of their families here in the U.S. and back home in El Salvador." Sally said that whenever she saw an immigrant in the U.S., Danilo's story made her think, "...what did you go through to be here? ... It's not like they just appeared here magically - everyone has a story." Sasha also reported that Danilo's story was important to the way she viewed the immigrant population in the U.S. because, after the trip, "When I see people who are Latino or Hispanic, I think about where they came from and some of those people that we met..." After getting home, she found herself looking at immigrants and thinking, 'Where did they come from? What's their story? What's their background?' And I kind of see more of their culture now..."

Poverty and Social Justice

Living with families in an economically impoverished community also made many of the students reflect on their conception of poverty as well as on issues of fairness and justice. Ellie believed the experience changed her understanding of poverty. She lived in a major metropolitan area in the United States and thought she was aware of poverty, but was not prepared for the kind of poverty she witnessed in El Salvador. She reflected,

...it's one thing to hear about the poverty... as soon as we got there, I was 'wow'... this

is completely different from anything here [in U.S.] ...there was something about just seeing all these little - shacks essentially - on the sides of mountains, and driving past tarps which represent people's homes it was just heartbreaking.

Darcey summarized her reaction, "I guess, understanding that...no one chooses to be poor." Kayla, who studied Minority and Urban Education, reported that living in the village gave her a different perspective about poverty. She said, "But when you live there and ... it was just like I couldn't imagine living like that for so long...." What surprised her the most is that "...they were so happy. So I'm like ... you don't have to have a lot to be happy. And they were making the best out of their situation. So I really respected them but it was tough without running water."

Several students were struck by the unfairness of what they witnessed. Experiencing the poverty first-hand and what it meant to be without things like running water challenged their basic conceptions of social justice and to question the way governments worked. Lydie reflected,

.... I don't know the meaning of social justice anymore, just because...the people that would deserve more they just can't have it...I just don't really understand it. None of it seems fair to me...there's not even a way for them to make their lives better.

She summed up her reaction by saying, "so - like, social justice...I couldn't really find any, I was just like, where is it anywhere?" For Niki, it raised awareness of issues related to social justice, like education. She recalled, "...I really didn't really care about social justice, because we're fine how we live... After coming back from El Salvador she began to view this as unfair and started to think of the role of government in creating the conditions of poverty, saying, "...

it's not fair for everyone to have different opportunities when it comes to education and just standards of living, I guess. It really depends on the government system, I realized."

Learning About the World

In addition to immigration and issues related to poverty and social justice, participating in this trip made many participants aware of how limited their knowledge of other parts of the world was. As Niki said in her final paper, "This trip gave me an opportunity to see the world beyond my own perspective." Most commented on the lack of knowledge they had about El Salvador in general as well as its civil war. Others extended this to how little they knew about the world in general and expressed an emerging desire to learn more. For Sally, it was basic things, "I had no idea about just like even their... currency or the fact that they use dollars, little things that I had no idea about and so just learning about the country and their history." She felt this was common, noting "... if you took a survey I bet one out of a hundred people would know about the history of El Salvador." Similarly, Kayla came away feeling that, despite the growing number of Salvadorans living in the area in which she lived, the knowledge of most people in the U.S. was often limited or stereotyped. She observed, "...everyone here has these preconceived notions of how it is in El Salvador, how dangerous it is...it was safer in that little community than it is [in her city]."

Darcey was among several students who commented on how little most people in the U.S. know about the war in El Salvador and its impact on the population there. Since her return, she worked hard to share that information with others, saying, "...we don't know about, but it happened. And how it affected them, and how they're living now. And what their lives are like." Most of the people she knew were unaware of El Salvador's history, "I've also been sharing with my friends, too.

Because they're like, 'where were you?' And I'm gonna say, 'La Secoya'? Well what does that mean to them? So... 'I was on a mountain that was part of the war'...describing the war..."

For many students, the U.S. role in that war came as a surprise and a factor that led them to question the news and their understanding of history. After learning this, Lydie exclaimed during a group reflection, "We have a lack of knowledge. People [U.S.] do not know!" During the same group reflection Tammy said, "I want to teach people that our history is not that neat and nice and we need to learn from it." After learning what happened from the perspective of some of the villagers in La Secoya, Darcey noted, "...it has caused me to...not take everything as the media says it...it's really helped me to pay attention to what is going on in the world more...." Lydie said that it helped her to realize how little she knew about the world and expressed her desire to change that. She found herself "... wanting to learn more about what's going on in the world. I definitely haven't been as good about it as I want to be... I really just don't know what's going on, and it's not good. So I've been trying to keep up." Lisa also realized what she didn't know about the world prior to her participation on the trip,

...we don't necessarily learn about all of the things that our government has done directly or indirectly to other countries... when we went on that nature walk, or the hike through the mountains and seeing the bombs... knowing that the United States had played a part in funding that was just so crazy to me.

After a group discussion Kirra stated, "This is not a U.S. issue, it is a human one. No one wants to be reminded of what they did." She was also impressed by the way the villagers – who had been deeply affected by the twelve-year civil war - distinguished between U.S. citizens and their government. In her interview, she

recalled being told “we don’t blame the American people, we blame the American government.” Lydie, in her final paper stated “It was weird to me that these people [Salvadorians] were being so inviting to us Americans who funded a war that destroyed their country and killed so many people.” Kirra saw this as “... a very interesting global view of what people see... also how they distinguish Americans from the American government, and how they parcel that out.” She now wanted to learn about people in her family and other parts of the world.

I think the biggest thing... was the importance of oral history... I was alive at this time of El Salvador's history and war. Being there and seeing people that have lived it...made me come back to the states and really want to talk to the people in my life who've gone through things...I do want to ask my dad is his response to being drafted for the Vietnam war, and how he wasn't picked because he was a student, and how as a new immigrant or not even legalized immigrant at that time, how did that affect him and how did it affect his views on the United States.

Teri also became conscious of how being absorbed in her studies had led her to a somewhat narrow focus, noting, “I never really have time to sit back and reflect on, on what the world is outside kind of my little circle here...” Some of the students indicated ways in which their participation in the trip made them want to learn more about the world. For example, Lydie said, “...it made me want to travel more... around the world...now I’m considering more studying abroad during the year, or during the summer, and I wasn’t going to before because of school.”

Discussion

The results of this case study contribute to the growing body of evidence which suggest that short-term study abroad experiences can have a

substantial impact on participating students when there is a strategically designed immersion component (Kiely, 2004, 2005; Jia, Peyvandi, Moghaddam, 2011; Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012), when it is carefully structured (Crabtree, 2013; Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Phillion, et al, 2009), and when it maximizes contacts with local communities (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Castaneda & Zirger, 2011; Czerwionka, Artamonova & Barbosa, 2015). This program was intentionally designed to include all of the above components. Prior to departure, students attended a series of pre-departure meetings and were assigned readings designed to prepare them for their experience in the village. They were also asked to create preliminary lessons and activities based upon specific criteria which they would eventually adapt in consultation with community leaders. Upon arrival in the economically impoverished village, students lived with host families. There was rigorous daily schedule which involved direct work in education and activities with host families and other community members. Faculty also stayed in the village with a host family, shared meals with students, and participated in activities (e.g., guest lectures, formal and informal reflections) alongside the students throughout the trip. This ongoing contact with students helped faculty work with students to deconstruct the experience and facilitated scaffolding of the experience throughout (Bately & Lupi, 2012; Kostovich, & Bermele, 2011).

While most students indicated that the trip was difficult at times, particularly in the beginning, by the end of the trip all indicated that it had a positive impact on them in the areas that were the focus of this study. That is, students reported that the experience was the source of considerable personal growth, that it facilitated their professional development, and that it helped them grow with respect to their global awareness. This is consistent with Palmer & Menard-Warwick (2012) who found that a

service-learning, study abroad experience helped preservice teachers develop multicultural awareness and skills during while working with children – skills that have the potential to inform future professional practice. Our findings are also consistent with Phillion, et al.'s (2009) study of pre-service teachers, who after participating in a three-week program in Honduras, had a deeper understanding of themselves and how to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. It is also possible that initial difficulties the many of the students in our study had, is in part consistent with Trilokekar, & Kukar's (2011) application of transformative learning theory – suggesting that there needs to be a "disorienting experience" (p. 1149) in order to change one's perspective. In this study, most participants reported at least minor issues with adjusting to the village at the beginning which may have been the catalyst for the impact on their personal, professional and global understandings.

When speaking of their own personal growth, all students reported that they became more appreciative of their friends and family, of their living circumstances at home, of the opportunities that they have had, especially their education. Students also described ways in which the experience influenced their personal perspective – often in ways that were unique to them as individuals (e.g., learning to trust, be grateful, self efficacy). Some students also clarified their values around material possessions, relationships and not judging people. This is consistent with other literature, which has found that short-term study abroad experiences have the power to influence students' adaptability (Mapp, 2012), a skill which is critical for teachers and social service professionals.

Students also indicated that the service-learning component of this experience had an important influence on their professional development - which is an area that has not

received much attention in previous literature. Most students found that the trip affirmed their career path, with some indicating that it clarified more specific interests in that path. Only one student indicated that she changed her career path entirely – deciding to shift from a career in special education to a career in medicine. Most students also described their experience as building their skills in working with culturally diverse children and families particularly Latino families indicating that they had a better understanding of this population and a greater level of comfort in working with them (Phillion, et al, 2009; Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012). The pre-service teachers who participated in this program will be able to use these skills in their placements and most importantly when they themselves become teachers. Additionally, by making students aware of ways in which their knowledge of the world was limited inspired many students to broaden this experience, something that will build their skills as future educators. This will be especially beneficial as the demographics of the local schools where they will intern and eventually be employed reflect the demographic of the children they worked with during the study abroad experience (Migrant Policy Institute, 2015). Additionally, students reported that their work improved more general teaching skills, helping them adapt lessons, become flexible in their delivery of instruction and the ability to differentiate instruction for the wide variety of ability and age groups of children who attended the biblioteca. This suggests such programs can be an important way to build some of the 'hard skills' of teaching – an area which we found no other studies related to the potential of service based study abroad programs. Most previous studies, which have included students in the area of education, have been confined to its impact on the more affective skills of teaching (i.e., empathy and respect of different cultures)

(Palmer & Menard-Warwick, 2012; Trilokekar & Kukar's, 2011).

Finally, consistent with previous studies (Batey & Lupi, 2012; Castaneda & Zirger, 2011; Czerwionka, Artamonva & Barbosa, 2015; Donnelly-Smith, 2009; Malewski, Sharma, Phillion, 2012; Mapp, 2012; Reynolds-Case, 2013; Smith & Mitry, 2008) we found that this program had an impact on students' level of global awareness. All participants reported a better understanding of issues related to education, reasons for and effects of illegal immigration as well as the effect of poverty. Some of the students reported a new perspective on the role of the United States in the world and made connections to U.S. foreign policy in the past and today. As the group was made up mostly of future educators this finding is especially important. In addition to teaching content, math, literacy, science, etc. educators, especially those working with young children are charged with sustaining and developing a knowledge base and curiosity of the world. This trip provided these future educators more knowledge of the world around them and perhaps more importantly an interest in learning more which they potentially will pass on to their future students.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

These data reflect a *slice of time* of one group of students on one specific service learning study abroad trip. Because there is not a common characterization of short-term programs it is difficult to compare the impact of this experience across experiences in the literature. The length, location, amount of direct academic content and the extent of immersion in the local context vary greatly in the literature. Although this study did follow students after they had returned, gone back to their daily lives in the United States, a longer term follow-up study is

necessary to determine if the impacts reported here are temporary or long lasting. It is also important to further explore the process of transformation to better understand what leads to a positive outcome. While we have noted literature indicating that certain structural aspects of the experience can have an important influence, more work is needed to identify other dimensions which contribute to the outcome. Trilokekar, & Kukar's (2011) have indicated the importance of a "disorienting experiences" on maximizing the impact programs such as the one described here – further research as to what aspects of the experience – help students move past initial difficulties would be useful in planning and implementing such experiences. Rowan-Kenyon and Niehaus (2011) found that participation in some kind of subsequent activity helped students integrate their learning during the trip. Thus, further research needs to be conducted on follow up activities after an experiential learning trip in order to maximize the impact of service learning short term study abroad experience for pre-service teachers.

In summary, this study adds to a limited body of literature suggesting that short-term, service-based study abroad experiences can provide students in education with important skills that will contribute to their future success as professionals in the field of education (i.e., understanding of personal, professional and global awareness).

Notes

1. We use pseudonyms to refer to all students, community members, speakers and specific locations throughout this manuscript
2. Unless otherwise noted, all direct quotes are taken from students' post-trip interview 2-4 months after the experience.
3. "Popular education" refers to education "of, by and for the pueblo" (Hammond, 1996). It is based on Friere's method of literacy education for impoverished communities

and ties education to consciousness raising about the conditions of poverty (Friere, 1970).

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